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ABSTRACT

Educators must accept the challenge of encouraging the lifetime reading habit in school. Students who are surrounded with books, newspapers, magazines, and other materials will be tempted to browse and to read from these sources. When selecting materials for the classroom, educators should work closely with the library media specialist who is usually aware of a wide variety of materials that are well-matched with students' interests and needs. This positive experience with reading builds independence and self-esteem, both of which are important for creating lifelong readers. After educators clutter the classroom with reading materials, they must give students the opportunity to read for pleasure in the classroom. By providing them with time to read in school, educators are sending students a message that lifetime literacy is a major instructional activity. A language arts educator should also be concerned with promoting and supporting the value of lifetime literacy across the curriculum. One way of supporting this challenge is to guide content area colleagues to include independent reading in their classroom for sustained blocks of time. The reading habit should be encouraged throughout the school year through methods such as reading aloud, booktalks, pairing young adult literature with traditional literature, and pairing of authors who are similar in their writing styles or themes. (A model of a student's yearlong schedule that includes independent reading is included, and 17 references are attached.) (MG)

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Encouraging the Lifetime Reading Habit

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What can we do to promote lifetime literacy? Can we justify using school time for developing the habit of reading? If so, how do we balance the rest of the language arts curriculum and also fulfill external requirements?

A dilemma seems to exist in our schools. While we know the importance of supporting lifetime literacy, we tend to become frustrated about not having enough time in school to attain this goal. We not only feel the pressure of fulfilling much of the language arts curriculum, but also encounter the stress of meeting state education department mandates. In New York State, for example, language arts expectations result in external evaluations, such as: the Pupil Evaluation Program for grades 3, 5, and 6, the Preliminary Competency Tests for grade 8, and the Regents Competency Tests for grade 11. In addition, New York State requires school districts to fulfill the Regents Action Plan which involves testing in other content areas. Students also are required to complete local standardized tests, and college-bound pupils are expected to achieve successfully with the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the American College Test. Since a similar testing frenzy exists throughout the United States, it is not surprising that we feel sandwiched between what we know we must do to promote lifetime literacy and what we consider to be less important demands that fragment teaching and learning. Compounding this dilemma is an important question concerning teacher empowerment: Who is driving language arts instruction? If we continue to succumb to external mandates, we are likely to

emphasize teacher-directed activities that support testing outcomes. We also might be coerced into believing that using school time for encouraging a love of reading is a waste of time. This diminishing control of our decision-making could translate into our students' loss of ownership concerning their lifetime literacy. Described another way, if we are not permitted to encourage independent reading in school because it is considered a frill, then our students will not experience a sense of ownership in selecting books that they want to read. They also will be denied the opportunity to develop the lifetime reading habit.

Independent reading, which is one way of supporting lifetime literacy, is not a frill. It can help students to refine skills and strategies by applying them to meaningful text (expository, descriptive, narrative). It also can help readers build their prior knowledge of different topics and improve their reading achievement through the natural process of reading. As important, independent reading motivates a love of reading as it supports the habit of reading (Sanacore 1988, 1989a).

During the past decade, I have become increasingly aware of the need to use school time for encouraging the reading habit. I have observed demographic trends that indicate many of our students are living in homes with two career-oriented parents or with single parents who must work. Thus, a number of our students enter homes each afternoon with little or no adult supervision. At the least, they probably become involved in too much television viewing, too much telephone conversation, and other activities that displace

reading for pleasure. Over time, they are more at risk of failing, of becoming illiterate or alliterate, and of dropping out of school. Since our students are not likely to do much pleasure reading at home, we must accept the challenge of encouraging the lifetime reading habit in school. Although independent reading is not a panacea, it represents an important step toward enhancing literacy for our students and for our society (Sanacore 1989b). Let us consider the following ways of creating lifelong readers.

Clutter up the classroom. If we surround students with books, newspapers, magazines, and other materials, they will be tempted to browse and to read some of these sources. When selecting materials for the classroom, we should work closely with the library media specialist because he or she is usually aware of a wide variety of materials that are well-matched with students' interests and needs. Cooperatively, we can clutter up the classroom so that our students have the opportunity to select their own material and to develop the habit of reading for pleasure. Over time, as we respect their choices and encourage their reading, our students will realize that particular books have a unique impact on them. For example, there are books that create emotional and sensory responses, that stimulate the imagination, that trigger new interests, that give solace, and that spark new directions. In reviewing reading autobiographies of lifelong readers, Carlsen and Sherrill (1988, 86) found that rarely was a book's appeal associated with its degree of literary merit. Often, what the

autobiographer

> remembered was the emotional impact of the book, the insights it provided whether for self or others, and the growth that it stimulated in the reader. The writers of the autobiographies described books as kindling the imagination, creating visions of life's possibilities, giving expression to the readers' own inarticulate feelings, as well as affecting their emotions, intellectual pursuits, and attitudes. In this way, books provide readers with a continuing, evolving view of both themselves and the world.

These findings help us to understand the importance of providing students with a wide variety of reading materials. They also remind us to respect our students' choices because reasons other than literary merit seem to be associated with a desire to read. Although we sometimes become anxious about our students' choices, Nell (1988) reminds us that as readers gain experience reading for pleasure they tend to select appropriate materials. This positive experience with reading builds independence and self-esteem, both of which are important for creating lifelong readers (Sanacore 1990).

Provide time for reading. A classroom cluttered with reading materials sets the stage for effective independent reading. What we must do now is give our students the opportunity to read for pleasure in the classroom. Those of us who are risk-takers will organize instructional activities during the school year so that

a major block of time is devoted to independent reading. In this plan, our students are immersed in the reading of interesting materials each day for about five weeks. They come to class, select books on their own, and read at their own comfortable pace. Our roles include securing a wide diversity of materials for our students and, upon request, providing guidance with book selection and with comprehension. While our students are reading, we also are reading. We should not be correcting papers, planning lessons, or doing other clerical tasks. Our students will consider their reading immersion to be more important if they see us demonstrating the joy of reading too.

I discussed this extensive commitment to independent reading in previous publications (Sanacore 1983, 1988), and I believe that it is especially needed today. Because of current demographic trends, societal pressures, and testing mandates (Sanacore 1989b), our students are more at risk of failing to become lifelong learners. By providing them with time to read in school, we are sending them a message that lifetime literacy is a major instructional activity.

As language arts teachers, however, we should be concerned not only with promoting lifetime literacy in our classrooms but also with supporting its value across the curriculum. We should be taking an active role in cooperating with our content area colleagues to stimulate independent reading in their classrooms. Without such schoolwide efforts, our students are likely to believe that reading for pleasure is an acceptable activity only in

language arts classes. To the contrary, they should experience the excitement of reading a diversity of materials in a variety of content area classes.

One way of supporting this challenging goal is to guide content area colleagues to include independent reading in their classrooms for sustained blocks of time. For example, an English teacher might help a social studies colleague incorporate independent reading into a unit focusing on World War II. At first, the English teacher might suggest that the textbook be used for covering important aspects of the War. When the social studies teacher is confident that essential information has been covered, the English teacher can make suggestions about other materials that poignantly deal with World War II. Thus, Corrie ten Boom's The Hiding Place, Bette Greene's Summer of My German Soldier, and Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl might be among the recommended literature that our students can appreciate reading in social studies classrooms. During the selection of such literature, the library media specialist can serve as a vital resource.

By initially encouraging a content area colleague to use his or her textbook, the English teacher is demonstrating respect for a dominant resource used in that subject area. By then suggesting works of literature, the English teacher is sensitively easing the colleague into experimenting with other materials for helping students learn about an instructional unit.

The more challenging task, however, is motivating the colleague to use a major block of time for reading about World War

II. We probably can provide such motivation in the form of supportive information. For example, five weeks of independent reading provide the teacher and students with thirty-five weeks for other instructional activities and quizzes. Thus, independent reading does not significantly impose on other important curricular areas (Sanacore 1988). We also should discuss with the colleague research findings, such as reading for pleasure is significantly linked to the amount of leisure time engaged in actual reading (Greaney & Hegarty 1987), and this in turn is linked to reading achievement (Greaney 1980). This information, by itself, is no guarantee that the colleague will include independent reading in the social studies classroom; however, a reasonable professional will at least consider adapting or experimenting with a new idea if he or she is made aware of supportive information (Morrow 1986; Sanacore 1989a).

Throughout this experimental period, we all must constantly remind ourselves that the purpose of this bold approach is to help our students realize that our content areas are both informational as well as interesting. Our ultimate goal, of course, is to have virtually every content area teacher supporting the lifetime reading habit (see the Figure). With no naivete intended, our efforts to promote a love of reading may result in former students visiting us and saying "Thanks to your support, I continue to read for pleasure!"

Encourage the reading habit throughout the school year. In

addition to extended blocks of time for independent reading, we should promote opportunities for reading as often as possible. Thus, the habit of reading will become part of our students' lifestyle.

According to Trelease (1989a, 1989b), when we regularly read aloud to our students, they have continuous exposure to a wide variety of books, richly textured experiences, extensive vocabulary, new information, a good reading role model, and the pleasures of reading. Matthews (1987) believes that the read aloud atmosphere should be warm, intimate, and trusting and that the teacher should select powerful passages that stimulate responses to the ideas presented. If copies of the resources we read aloud are available in the classroom clutter and if we provide class time for reading, our students are more apt to read these resources. About fifteen minutes of silent reading several days a week are probably sufficient. As our students become absorbed in their selections, they might continue reading them at home.

Another way of promoting the love of reading is through a booktalk. A talk that is well-presented is entertaining as well as enticing. Its main purpose is to motivate individuals to want to know more about a book (Bodart 1980). Although school librarians give booktalks as one of their many roles, we can also share our enjoyment of books through frequent talks. The following suggestions, adapted from Chelton (1976) and Donelson and Nilsen (1989), increase the potential for successful booktalks: (1) Be well-prepared so that eye contact is easily maintained. (2)

Organize books so that they can be shown during the talk. To lessen confusion, attach a card with pertinent notes on it to the back of each book. (3) Present excerpts that reflect the style and tone of the books. (4) Present a wide variety of books during the school year rather than focus on a limited number of themes. (5) Use different formats, such as some poetry or a short movie. (6) Keep records of the books that have been presented so that before and after circulation figures on the books can be compared.

Although booktalks can motivate a love of reading, the pairing of young adult books with traditional literature can also stimulate a desire to read. According to La Blanc (1980, 35-36):

> These book teams have several advantages over teaching significant literature in isolation. The reader is hooked on the theme by reading the easily manageable adolescent novel first. The more difficult book has the advantage of being based on a familiar theme and is associated with the positive, successful experience of reading the young adult novel.

La Blanc believes that as teenage readers make the connection between young adult literature and its traditional adult counterpart, they are more likely to grow into lifelong readers. Suggested pairing of books includes Irene Hunt's Across Five Aprils with Ernest Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls; Mildred Taylor's Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry with Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird; and Sue Ellen Bridgers' Home Before Dark with John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath.

In addition to the pairing of books, we could extend this

method to the pairing of authors who are similar in their writing styles or themes. Donelson and Nilsen (1989) suggest that we begin instructional units with an important young adult author, progress to a modern adult writer, and move on to an established author. For example, students could be exposed to Robert Cormier as a significant writer for young adults, to James Baldwin as an important modern author for adults, and finally to Henrik Ibsen as a major established writer. These writers have similarities in their thematic focus (the individual vs. the system) and in their literary focus (development of plot).

The pairing of books and authors can stimulate a desire to read. This method also has the potential for promoting lifetime readers who appreciate a variety of themes and literary styles.

As classroom teachers, we often feel pressured about balancing instructional activities for our students. We attempt to be sensitive to demographic trends, to meet external mandates, and to provide valuable literacy learning experiences. We also know that schools are becoming the major source of lifelong learning. Although our schools cannot be everything to everyone, we must stay committed to supporting lifetime literacy efforts. Cluttering up the classroom with a wide variety of interesting materials, providing major blocks of time for independent reading, and encouraging the reading habit during the entire school year are three schoolwide approaches for promoting lifetime readers. Success with these and other approaches requires the cooperative support of classroom teachers, library media specialists,

administrators, and parents. Such support, of course, involves time and hard work, but these efforts will show their worth when our future society demonstrates not only an ability to read but also a desire to read!

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Model of a Student's Yearlong Schedule
That Includes Independent Reading

	First Progress Period		Second Progress Period		Third Progress Period		Fourth Progress Period	
1. English	IR							
2. Social Studies		IR						
3. Physical Education			*					
4. Science				IR				
5. Mathematics					IR			
6. Lunch						*		
7. Foreign Language							IR	
8. Elective								IR

Note - Each box represents five weeks

IR - Independent Reading

☐ - Traditional Instruction

* - In this schedule, independent reading is not included in the areas of physical education and lunch, since physical education is offered twice a week and lunch is not an instructional period. These areas, however, are appropriately spaced so that no gap in free reading is longer than 5 weeks. Thus, the student experiences independent reading in all four 10-week progress periods.

This model is adopted from Joseph Sanacore, "Schoolwide Independent Reading: The Principal Can Help," Journal of Reading, vol. 31 (January 1988), pp. 346-353.